

Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) for the Commonwealth The Virginia Model

Frequently Asked Questions

Who needs to teach the WRS?

The Virginia Department of Education requires that WRS be taught within every CTE course offering in the Commonwealth. This requirement is linked to Perkins legislation and CTE program funding.

Why does Virginia call them “Workplace Readiness Skills” and not “soft skills” or “employability skills”?

Workplace Readiness Skills is the title that best identifies this skill set. “Soft skills” was seen as too generic and “employability skills” as too limiting. WRS represent a combination of employability and college-readiness skills and behaviors.

Why are the WRS important?

According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, *Framework for 21st Century Learning*, “All Americans, not just an elite few, need 21st century skills that will increase their marketability, employability and readiness for citizenship.” Extensive research, led by the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia, provided evidence that there was a need to teach workplace skills in the classroom. The Weldon Cooper Center then created the guiding philosophy regarding the breadth of each skill item and the language used in the final list.

Why these skills and not others, such as “leadership”?

Virginia is focused on creating a practical list of the highest priority skills and behaviors that employers demand to see in their employees. Using the best research and data on expectations of students in Career and Technical Education and students in general, leadership did not surface as an essential “employability skill.” Our Virginia employers confirmed this. However, the Commonwealth acknowledges leadership as a valuable quality and a skill to acquire and cultivate.

Leadership (and similar traits such as “Citizenship”) is broader than a single skill that can be taught in a single unit of instruction. Moreover, it is embedded in many of the Workplace Readiness Skills.

We try to emphasize “Sustainability” in our CTE courses. Is it a part of the Workplace Readiness Skills?

Yes. Taking the same approach as with leadership, Virginia readily acknowledges that “sustainability” skills should be a concern with all CTE content, and not just in the area of workplace readiness. Although sustainability may not be singled out in the list of WRS, concepts of sustainability are embedded in specific WRS tasks through task definitions and supporting instructional resources.

What are the benefits for students and employers?

Students who successfully pass Virginia’s Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment (through CTECS) will earn industry certification for any CTE course, as well as a certificate of achievement and a student-selected verified credit. Students who learn to apply these skills will improve their chances of being hired and promoted. The WRS were put into place with guidance from employers to counteract the widening workplace-expectations gap in new hires. Employers will benefit from applicants who have acquired WRS that complement strong technical skills and academic achievement.

What are the benefits for teachers?

CTE teachers are adept at teaching technical content and encouraging students to acquire the technical skills required for specific jobs. Now that key workplace readiness skills have become course competencies, it is easier for teachers to precisely identify the content they are expected to teach. To offer teachers additional help, task definitions and links to instructional resources are provided for each skill.

What are the benefits for administrators?

Secondary schools in Virginia report the number of credentials earned by students for passing occupational competency assessments, state licensure examinations, industry certification examinations, and now the workplace readiness skills assessments to satisfy Perkins requirements. The Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment is on par with other industry credentials, and yet it is also unique. Success on the assessment is now reported within its very own category on the school report card. This underscores the importance of this credential.

How much time should teachers spend teaching these skills? Won't it take away from their regular course content?

The time teachers spend teaching these essential skills is up to them. Some schools recommend that the set of 21 WRS is taught as a stand-alone unit of instruction. Some schools think it is better to teach WRS in the context of course-specific CTE lessons, projects, and assignments. Teachers may infuse any number of WRS within existing lesson plans or scenarios they already use. Whatever the strategy, teachers should know that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between specific course content and the Workplace Readiness Skills.

Where is the teacher's guide?

There is no stand-alone teacher's guide, because the WRS are represented as the first 21 items in every CTE course task/competency list. The skills were turned into task/competencies that every CTE student must achieve. Supporting resources are now linked to each of these tasks and are accessed through any course framework in Verso, Virginia's curriculum management system. Therefore, the "teacher's guide" is included within every CTE course framework. The questions on the Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment are fully correlated to these first 21 tasks and their definitions.

How do I get started with the assessment?

Go to [Workplace Readiness Skills for the Commonwealth Assessment](#) offered through CTECS. This is a comprehensive informational page. Click on the links to get more information about the exam, proctoring, site administration, and more. The main contact for the Workplace Readiness Assessment at CTECS is Ken Potthoff.